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Engaging in Politics: Christian Leadership in Every Capacity

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Steve Kelly

If you find yourself in the middle of a political conversation, your first instinct might be to change the subject or walk away. If you notice some volunteers promoting a political candidate or public issue, it may seem more convenient to move along without making eye contact. When we hear the phone ring, we are all tempted to hang up the instant we sense the call might be from a political organization.

Political discussions can divide people, so it's no mystery why many of us avoid these kinds of situations whenever possible. As the presidential election is in the spotlight across the United States, we find ourselves in more and more discussions about the candidates we like and the issues that are important to us. As a student in Iowa just days before the caucuses, exposure to presidential campaigns seems impossible to avoid.

Public sector issues are a never-ending conversation with seemingly no solutions, so why should we be engaging this area of society, and how do we do so as Christians? Government and the public sector represent one of the many social institutions or "spheres" in our lives. Just as we apply our Christian principles to our families, academics, athletics, and churches, God also calls us to do the same in government.

The public sector is an area in desperate need of Christian influence. There is no shortage of news articles about corruption in government, so we are well aware of what we are up against. Redeeming the government sphere of life is undoubtedly a difficult task, but just as Christians are called to other spheres of society, Christian leaders are needed in government, too.

Not everyone is called to be a leader within a government institution. There is a broad spectrum of ways to further the Kingdom of God in government without necessarily working in the public sector. Some of us might be called to serve as elected officials, and God may use others of us to influence our friends and family. Some roles might be in the national spotlight like a presidential campaign, but most of us will be involved on a smaller scale. Regardless of the publicity we get for influencing others, every capacity in which God uses us is important.

Perhaps you are called to run for an elected office at the state or local level. Maybe you start a discussion with some friends about how a Christian should approach a certain issue. Any capacity in which you can influence politics from a Christian perspective is a way to further the Kingdom.

One of the ways God has been using me over the past few years is through a political organization that I started. As a student at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, I saw a need for political engagement among the student body. My goal when forming this organization has been to encourage political engagement among students on my campus by meeting with those serving in leadership positions in government. Our organization focuses on Republican Party ideals, but the influence of our group led to the start of a Democrat group on campus as well. Party favoritism aside, we have been having some great political discussions here recently.

You might be in a position to start or lead a political organization, and you could even take it a few steps

further. Christians are desperately needed to serve in these roles. For most of us, however, our level of involvement might be smaller but still incredibly important.

I have always believed in the axiom that all of politics is local. The most effective change happens from the ground up, which means the most important way to be involved is at the local level. Our beliefs are impacted most by the people who are closest to us, so our interactions with others have a significant impact on people's perceptions. I am encouraging all Christians to be more engaged in politics because we can have an important influence on an institution that impacts every aspect of life. The more Christians that engage politics with an open-minded and biblically focused perspective, the more we can advance the Kingdom through government.

If you agree that Christians should be leaders in politics, consider some of the following ways to get more involved. Joining an organization at the county level is a great place to start. Every county has an established organization that promotes the values of its respective political party. These groups will host speakers, organize social events, and promote local and state candidates. The interactions you have with others who are involved can build relationships and lead to a stronger sense of community. In my personal experience, I have developed friendships with many of the people I met through politics. Getting involved at the county level is a great way to have an influence on local politics while building relationships.

Another way to get more involved is to volunteer for a campaign. If you support a candidate, volunteering for his or her campaign can be another way to influence others. You will get to meet a lot of people whose views differ significantly from your own. If there is not a candidate that you can support, perhaps there is a specific issue that you care deeply about. There are organizations that focus on a variety of public sector issues such as taxes, abortion, climate change, foreign relations, etc. If you are still in school or a young professional, there are a variety of organizations, similar to the one I started, that aim to engage younger people. Regardless of level of involvement, it is important for Christians to be leaders in every capacity.

The next time you find yourself in a political discussion, consider engaging in the conversation before changing the subject. Take a step out of your comfort zone and start the discussion yourself. The decisions we make with our votes are important. As Christians we can't afford to sit on the sidelines without engaging a part of life that needs our leadership.